

hear your guests describe their feelings, we can only assume that they so disagree on these fundamental issues that these 2 days of negotiations have been a failure.

The President. Well, I'll tell you what I'll do.

Q. So why not let them speak?

The President. I'll tell you what I'll do. I'm telling you, the only reason that they asked me to do this is because you've asked me some very interesting and difficult questions, some of which would be even more difficult for them to answer than for me. So they wanted me to answer it so we wouldn't, any of us, say anything that would wreck what we're trying to do Sunday morning. But if they would like to come up—and since I've answered my last question, if they would—if any of them would like to come up and make a brief statement, or all of them would, I would be happy to have them make a brief statement.

Your Majesty, would you like to start? Anybody want to go?

So, now this is a miracle. *[Laughter]* I didn't part the waters, but I have silenced the voices. *[Laughter]*

Thank you very much. Thank you.

NOTE: The President's 129th news conference began at 2:45 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. Present at the news conference were King Hussein I of Jordan, Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu of Israel, and Chairman Yasser Arafat of the Palestinian Authority.

Statement on Signing the Antarctic Science, Tourism, and Conservation Act of 1996

October 2, 1996

I have today signed into law H.R. 3060, the "Antarctic Science, Tourism, and Conservation Act of 1996."

Almost 40 years ago, the United States proposed a treaty among the nations carrying out scientific research in Antarctica. The resulting Antarctic Treaty establishes this fascinating and remote region of our planet as a zone of peace, reserved exclusively for peaceful uses, and guarantees freedom of scientific research there.

The Antarctic Treaty has proven a uniquely successful agreement and has spawned an innovative system of supplementary agreements to protect the Antarctic environment and conserve its living resources. For these reasons, it gives me particular pleasure to sign into law legislation that will provide authority for the United States to ratify the most recent extension of that system: the Protocol on Environmental Protection to the Antarctic Treaty. The Protocol sets forth mandatory rules for the protection of the environment of Antarctica and the promotion of scientific research there.

The bill that I have signed today implements the provisions of the Environmental Protocol. The Senate has already given its advice and consent to ratification of the Protocol.

Enactment of this legislation reaffirms United States leadership in Antarctic affairs. Our leadership is expressed in our world class research program on the ice, which is helping to answer basic questions about the earth. The United States has also provided leadership in the innovative diplomacy that has made Antarctica a shining example of constructive international cooperation.

I would like to pay particular tribute to those who made this legislation possible: the U.S. negotiators who crafted the Protocol and the legislators who have provided for its implementation. Congressional passage of this legislation reflected the bipartisan partnership that has been the hallmark of our Antarctic policy. I would like to pay tribute to the House Science Committee and the Senate Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committee, which took the initiative to move this bill. In particular, I commend Senator John Kerry for his continued interest and support for implementation of the Protocol and Chairman Bob Walker and Representative George Brown for their initiative in moving this important legislation in this Congress. Finally, I would like to recognize the leadership of the Vice President on this issue, dating back to his days in the Senate.

William J. Clinton

The White House,
October 2, 1996.

NOTE: H.R. 3060, approved October 2, was assigned Public Law No. 104-227.

Statement on Signing the Electronic Freedom of Information Act Amendments of 1996

October 2, 1996

I am pleased to sign into law today H.R. 3802, the "Electronic Freedom of Information Act Amendments of 1996."

This bill represents the culmination of several years of leadership by Senator Patrick Leahy to bring this important law up to date. Enacted in 1966, the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) was the first law to establish an effective legal right of access to government information, underscoring the crucial need in a democracy for open access to government information by citizens. In the last 30 years, citizens, scholars, and reporters have used FOIA to obtain vital and valuable government information.

Since 1966, the world has changed a great deal. Records are no longer principally maintained in paper format. Now, they are maintained in a variety of technologies, including CD ROM and computer tapes and diskettes, making it easier to put more information on-line.

My Administration has launched numerous initiatives to bring more government information to the public. We have established World Wide Web pages, which identify and link information resources throughout the Federal Government. An enormous range of documents and data, including the Federal budget, is now available on-line or in electronic format, making government more accessible than ever. And in the last year, we have declassified unprecedented amounts of national security material, including information on nuclear testing.

The legislation I sign today brings FOIA into the information and electronic age by clarifying that it applies to records maintained in electronic format. This law also broadens public access to government information by placing more material on-line and

expanding the role of the agency reading room. As the Government actively disseminates more information, I hope that there will be less need to use FOIA to obtain government information.

This legislation not only affirms the importance, but also the challenge of maintaining openness in government. In a period of government downsizing, the numbers of requests continue to rise. In addition, growing numbers of requests are for information that must be reviewed for declassification, or in which there is a proprietary interest or a privacy concern. The result in many agencies is huge backlogs of requests.

In this Act, the Congress recognized that with today's limited resources, it is frequently difficult to respond to a FOIA request within the 10 days formerly required in the law. This legislation extends the legal response period to 20 days.

More importantly, it recognizes that many FOIA requests are so broad and complex that they cannot possibly be completed even within this longer period, and the time spent processing them only delays other requests. Accordingly, H.R. 3802 establishes procedures for an agency to discuss with requesters ways of tailoring large requests to improve responsiveness. This approach explicitly recognizes that FOIA works best when agencies and requesters work together.

Our country was founded on democratic principles of openness and accountability, and for 30 years, FOIA has supported these principles. Today, the "Electronic Freedom of Information Act Amendments of 1996" re-forges an important link between the United States Government and the American people.

William J. Clinton

The White House,
October 2, 1996.

NOTE: H.R. 3802, approved October 2, was assigned Public Law No. 104-231.